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¹² For more information on both versions of *Il fu Mattia Pascal* see Osvaldo Campassi and Virgilio Sabel, "Chenal, L'Herbier e *Il fu Mattia Pascal*," *Cinema*, prima serie, No. 117 (10 May, 1941). Also see Mario Pannunzio, "Chenal di Fronte a Pirandello," *Cinema*, prima serie, No. 10 (25 November, 1936).

¹³ Roma, p. 22.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Mario Verdone, *Gli Intellettuali e il Cinema* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Atteneo, 1952), p. 226.

¹⁶ Luigi Pirandello and Adolf Lantz, *Six Personen suchen einen Autor: Film-novelle . . . nach dem gleichnamigen Theaterstück von Pirandello* (Berlin: Reimar Hobbing, 1930). French translation by E. Goldey, "Six Personnages en quête d'Auteur:

histoire pour l'écran par Luigi Pirandello et Adolf Lantz," *La Revue du Cinéma*, Number 10 (May, 1930), pp. 35-53.

¹⁷ In "Dramma e Sonoro," *Cinema*, prima serie, Number 81 (10 November 1939), pp. 277-278.

¹⁸ Alberto Cavalcanti, "The Sound Film," in Lewis Jacobs, *The Emergence of Film Art* (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1969), p. 175.

¹⁹ The essay first appeared in the newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, Milan, 16 June 1929. On July 28, 1929 it appeared as a feature article in *The New York Times*.

²⁰ See "Intervista con Luigi Pirandello sul Cinema Italiano" in the newspaper *La Stampa*, Turin, December 9, 1932.

RANDALL CONRAD

Diaries of Two Chambermaids

Mirbeau's *Diary of a Chambermaid* is a violent, cruel novel, written out of hatred for the corruption of bourgeois society, for the lies and servility with which it infects every mind and relationship. Celestine's "diary" intersperses the story of her service in the Lanlaire household—ending with Joseph's robbery, her marriage to him, and their new life as café proprietors in Cherbourg—with recollections that fill in her background and character. A contradictory character, in which a sensual depravity, acquired from her masters, exists together with the most ardent love*: the two poles are transcended only in her terrible attraction to Joseph. Published in 1900, only months after the scandalous second court-martialing of Dreyfus, the novel uses Celestine's lucid observations to portray all the machinations of a provincial bourgeoisie as it begins to brandish anti-Semitism and nationalism as political weapons.

The two film versions were produced under practically opposite circumstances. Renoir made his (1946, with Paulette Goddard and Burgess Meredith) during a period of exile, no doubt unsure of his future although willing to work for American studios, filming a Hollywood script on Hollywood sets, a world away from his prewar work in France. Buñuel, on the other hand, was at the height of his new creative freedom when a French producer offered him the chance to film the novel he admired (1964, with Jeanne Moreau and Michel Piccoli).

Renoir's film retains some of the brutal scenes in Mirbeau, like Joseph's sadistic killing of the geese, and it creates new ones (in the final sequence, a sudden image of Joseph lashing at the crowd, with his horsewhip). Renoir gives all the richness he can to particular scenes, letting some develop naturally, giving unexpected turns to others (the scene in the greenhouse), creating the suspense and climax with skill. But, one feels—this marks the decline of Renoir's cinema—whatever style the film has is only compensation for a deficiency in conception.

* "I shall gather the flowers for his bouquet, one by one, in the garden of my heart . . . where grow the deadly flowers of debauchery, but where also bloom the tall white lilies of love."

Renoir's
DIARY OF A
CHAMBER-
MAID, with
Paulette
Goddard



Even Joseph, Georges, and Celestine herself are stereotyped figures. Renoir's screenplay exteriorizes the contradiction within Celestine by creating a direct conflict between Georges and Joseph, between love and evil, and then simplifying the terms of even this conflict so that Georges easily triumphs. In the process, the deep sensuality of Mirbeau's heroine, capable of loving opposite types of men, disappears. One looks in vain for any sign of real erotic attraction between Paulette Goddard as Celestine and either Francis Lederer as Joseph or Hurd Hatfield as Georges.

Joseph's rape and murder of the little girl are entirely omitted from Renoir's version. Instead he kills Mauger, for money. (Mauger is portrayed as eccentric and even inhuman, but not malicious.) The substitution of crimes reduces Joseph, in effect, to a predictable character. The irrational crime is horrible in its isolation (as is the image of the dead girl which Buñuel creates in his version); behind the crime of murdering Mauger we can see a common motive.

Georges, the Lanlaires' son in Renoir's version, actually combines two characters from the novel's recollected parts. One is Georges,

the consumptive whom Celestine loves . . . and kills with her love.* The other is Xavier, the dissolute cynic she loves in spite of herself and in spite of his contemptuous treatment.

Renoir has combined them selectively, leaving out drawbacks (Georges's moribund constitution, Xavier's cynicism) and keeping only Georges's virtue and Xavier's privileged position. With this combination Renoir easily obtains a perfect antagonist to Joseph. The antagonism proceeds, not from Celestine's attraction to both at once, but simply from the sinister doings of Joseph, who is bent on taking Celestine away almost by force (trying to implicate her in his crimes, etc.).

Celestine is thus deprived of inner conflict. At the beginning she is a realist, resolved to marry money, but her love for Georges wins out. Joseph is unequivocally defeated in Renoir's ending, whereas in Mirbeau, Celestine

*Mirbeau pushes the love-death identity to the limit of atrocity: "I glued my lips to his, I clashed my teeth against his, with such trembling rage that I thought my tongue was penetrating the deep wounds inside his chest and licking, drinking, drawing out all the poisoned blood and all the deadly pus."

becomes Joseph's wife and accomplice. In the final sequence, Celestine becomes a popular heroine, rebellious and free, distributing the Lanlaires' hoard to the townspeople.

Renoir's townspeople are united by their longstanding hatred of the Lanlaires, so that they all support Celestine's rebellion at the end. Such a simple opposition of forces would be unthinkable in Buñuel's version. His provincial countryside is oppressive: cold deserted roads, grey skies, faceless church, laconic villagers. Buñuel's film dwells on the Monteil estate (Buñuel changes the family name) until it becomes a universe. Indoors is Madame Monteil's world of bourgeois order and obsession: don't break the lamps, don't walk on the rug . . . The only escape is outdoors, where the men find sublimation in their ritual destructions (killing animals, chopping wood, breaking panes).^{*} Buñuel also expands a character who occupied only a couple of early pages in Mirbeau's novel: Monsieur Rabour. The old man embodies the sexual frustration (his fetish) and unnatural isolation (his locked room) that dominate the household.

Buñuel's version eliminates all the background material in the novel, including Georges, and makes a closed, mysterious person of Celestine as played by Jeanne Moreau. If there are contradictions within her, they appear only through her relation to Joseph, a relation which even in its hatred is suffused erotically. In a shot of the two of them outdoors at night, their faces are lit from below by the glow of a fire as Joseph tells her, "You and I are alike, in our souls." (Joseph makes this assertion to Celestine in Renoir's version too—but he can't mean it. The whole film is based on the irreconcilable contrast between them.)

*The association is meant to work almost subconsciously. At one point, Buñuel goes from an outdoor to an indoor sequence by cutting from a shot of Monteil splitting wood with his ax to a shot of a fragile white bust adorning a cabinet indoors. This theme reappears, realized to some extent, when the old man's death behind a locked bedroom door forces Joseph to take an ax to the woodwork.

Celestine is realistic about her prospects; she probably plans to marry for money. At the same time she is the only character who has a keen sense of justice. She alone intuits that it was Joseph who raped and killed the girl. Without revealing her feelings, she comes back to the household she despises in order to personally get even with Joseph for his crime. She sacrifices her own integrity to incriminate Joseph: she sleeps with him, she plants false evidence. And her effort to bring Joseph to "justice" is a failure.

One reason may be that she is suppressing a strong attraction to Joseph. If she is seeking to incriminate him, it is partly because getting rid of Joseph will ease her own trouble as well as avenge the dead girl.

But, independently of Celestine's designs or motivations, her effort is destined to fail. Celestine has only her own resources. Joseph has ambitions and plans that have been ripening for years . . . and he has connections. Buñuel has already shown us whose side official justice is on, in a key episode between Mauger and Monteil. Monteil, the Jew, brings his dispute with Mauger, the retired army captain, before the magistrate. Mauger, who we know is guilty, is upheld on his word of honor as an officer.

The film's dovetail ending—one sequence showing Celestine with Mauger, the next showing Joseph in Cherbourg—is the logical outcome of Celestine's predicament. She refused to be used by Joseph in Cherbourg, but she has also failed to enjoy any victory over Joseph, which alone could have vindicated her. She forfeits her freedom and consents to be Mauger's wife.

These things represent a crucial departure from Mirbeau's novel. In Mirbeau, Celestine overcomes her scruples and completely gives in to her passion for Joseph. In Buñuel Celestine tries and fails to incriminate Joseph. If she fails, it is because she could only confront Joseph as an individual, as a common-law criminal, whereas Joseph has more than in-

TWO CHAMBERMAIDS

dividual resources, having cast his lot with the growing fascist movement.

Only Joseph, the child-rapist and murderer, the Jew-hater, successfully engineers his freedom. Unlike Mirbeau (and Renoir), Buñuel has eliminated Joseph's theft of the family's silver. Thus Joseph's rise in the world is the result, financially, only of his shady investments—"Politics pays, now and then"—not of a simple crime. (Besides, that would detract from the isolated horror of the rape and murder—which will now never be avenged.) The final sequence finds Joseph on the road of petty bourgeois prosperity, an active militant in the fascist movement. The café in Cherbourg; Joseph's new wife (she looks like Celestine); the fascist demonstration; the slogan "Vive Chiappe" launched by Joseph; the final thunderclap: this final sequence gives an unusually explicit (for Buñuel) political dimension to Celestine's moral failure and her resignation.

In dramatizing the contradiction between Celestine's impulse and a social reality that turns it into its opposite, Buñuel does more than alter his source to suit his own preferred structure. He redefines Celestine's relation to Joseph for a different historical period, our own.

The anti-Jewish, anti-foreign nationalism of 1900 was provoked in France by the Dreyfus affair, and it grew amid rumors of war with England. Mirbeau's Celestine, who gives in to her passion, symbolizes a moral capitulation before the forces that Joseph represents.

Buñuel has updated the time to around 1930, when the French fascist movement was spreading: Joseph and the sacristan read *Action Française*. At the least, Celestine is a moral witness to the bestiality of Joseph, something she tried to stop and couldn't. But perhaps her secret attraction, her fear of it, and her individual powerlessness make her an accomplice to Joseph's rise. In that case, Joseph's assertion—"You and I are alike, in our souls"—takes on full meaning.

Both Renoir and Buñuel, each with a purpose, made radical changes in Mirbeau. Renoir's version uses every means to reduce Mirbeau's story to the triumph of a healthy popu-



Buñuel's *DIARY OF A CHAMBERMAID*:
Jeanne Moreau

lar spirit over an evil force. It has eliminated all the historical and social relevance of Mirbeau (the theme of anti-semitism in particular disappears). The film takes place in a bygone, socially indistinct France. No doubt Renoir intended it to have an immediate sentimental appeal among Americans and Europeans who had recently lived through World War II and the liberation of the occupied countries. The film would counter the image of a servile France under Vichy that had been current in American propaganda.

Buñuel, on the other hand, returned in his film to the France he left in the thirties, and created its portrait. It is, however, decidedly not just the portrait of a past era. The film has the closed structure characteristic of Buñuel: the end is a beginning. An individual's gesture toward freedom not only fails but lays the ground for still worse oppression. The era that has begun, as the demonstrators turn the corner and march up a street in Cherbourg, is the one we are still living in.